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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the use of movies on videotape in the English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classroom begins with a brief review of the history and emergence of videotape recordings as a popular technology. The advantages of video as a language teaching aid are then examined, including its instructional flexibility, exposure to paralinguistic features, interest and ability to capture the imagination, ability to activate passive knowledge, capacity to extend the range of language environments studied, and potential for cultural content. Literature on the use of video in ESL instruction is reviewed, addressing such topics as its instructional effectiveness, video selection, length of segment used, videos' educational vs. entertainment value, use of content for classroom discussion, video use for testing, and types of commercial and authentic materials available for classroom use. Contains 16 references. (MSE)

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Aspects of Video Movie English Teaching

David John Wood

1. Video History

Video began its industrial life as a hybrid reel-to-reel audio tape in the late 1950s. The original two-inch tape was later reduced to one inch, and then to half an inch by Sony's upgrade on a black and white portapak with transistorized recorder in 1965. Perhaps the most decisive development came in 1970 with Sony's U-matic format, which reached Britain two years later. At the same time, Philips targeted the home with a standard half-inch tape video cassette recorder. Sony's betamax (and the popular half-inch VHS format produced by other Japanese companies) effectively took over control of domestic sales, arriving in the British market by 1978. In the early 1980s came the advent of the features that give video its element of control: fast forward, rewind, pause, remote control and so on. And thus the pre-recorded video market was brought into being. Two of video's first main non-industrial results were instructional/promotional tapes and the shifting of feature films into the living room.

The last quarter of the twentieth century has been a watershed in the development of technology in teaching English, and nowhere more so than in the area of video. Comprehensive studies of audio-visual technology in language teaching at the beginning of this period (such as El-Araby, 1974) barely mention video, and can give no indication of the dramatic spread in its use. When it is mentioned, they take it only to mean programs made specifically for language learning, such as the vintage *Walter & Connie Reporting* BBC series. Now into the 1990s, no study of language teaching

can avoid mentioning video's potential, whether it be in terms of: video observation as a valid learning process (Brumfitt, 1991), its effectiveness as a means of language input (Bolitho, 1990), or its cultural depth (Wringe, 1989).

Video in the domestic arena has existed only in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Soundtracked films have been around for the better part of a century. While they were confined to the cinema (or reel-to-reel showings in schools) until the seventies, they are now predominantly a homewatching phenomenon. Their use in schools has also expanded. Ironically, although America is the home of film production (at least in terms of bulk), Japanese companies like Sony have been taking over large chunks of the former American monopoly since the late eighties. Video continues to change shape and form, but the essential features that make videos potential language teaching texts are constant.

Recent years have seen many new turns, like interactive video, digital video tape and Sony's video on demand system, which has introduced the concept of video networking although still beset by such problems as copyright and up-to-date methodology. It must be left to future studies to assess the implications of these recent developments on the teaching of English as a foreign language. The expansive range of video applications in TEFL in general is too great to explain fully here.

Instead, such basic issues are considered in this paper as deciding why video is a suitable TEFL resource and determining which video materials have the greatest potential. Video movies will be considered in particular, in terms of: their curricular status, the special features they offer for TEFL, the time frames in which they have been used, what aspects of language they can be used to teach, and what kinds of video movie resource materials exist.

2. Why Video and Which Kind is Most Effective?

Traditional grammar translation appears less effective than content-based language teaching in terms of such vital factors as memorability and schema development. By extension, video with interesting content and meaningful context is also likely to be both memorable and capable of developing students' language skills because of the valid and vivid actuation of language situations it can command.

Unlike real-life language situations, which are uncontrollable and unrepeatable, videos can of course be replayed exactly a limitless number of times, both by a teacher and a student if working independently. Video also makes it possible to study paralinguistic features, which comprise over half of any face-to-face communication act, and may be impossible to isolate meaningfully in other accessible forms.

Good video can engage the imagination and interest of its viewers when eager to learn what happens next. Second only to native-speaking language teachers themselves, for example, movies have been found to be a prime motivational force in studying English (Kirk, 1992). Because video can embody a comparatively natural, living context for the language it contains, a communication act can be easier to grasp and thus understand in all its aspects. It is likely, therefore, to be easier to learn language from. A student can simultaneously visualize what he or she is hearing (Stempleski in Wood, 1990b). Video, plus the right kinds of support material, activate the passive knowledge of language learners in particular, and assist with language assimilation and transfer, both in terms of that language presented as well as that which is implicitly suggested.

The most intangible but arguably most vital element of a language stimulus is the ability to affect its user. This is not to say that video

possesses such a quality automatically, but that careful selection can create the possibility both for students to learn the language and to be inspired at the same time. Ideally, the inspiration that video can generate tends to promote not only language learning, but acquisition of insights.

Video offers both "a multilingual and a multicultural oasis, in what is essentially an otherwise monolingual and monocultural society" (Wood, 1992a), and can thus help with the kinds of general problem confronting EFL when there is limited contact with those whose first language is English. Of course, video movies cannot solve every problem alone, but they can play a big part in effective language acquisition for both EFL and ESL students. The sense of achievement that students gain from understanding even a short scene in a movie is important, especially in those environments where the kind of English in use does not exist communicatively, and thus lacks spontaneity. A clear distinction can be felt between former and recent age groups which have had much greater access to films, including even cable and satellite television in many cases. Movies have both greatly multiplied in number, as well as having become readily and cheaply available in many different and controllable forms, ranging from video rental to off-air video tape recording, flexibly available through timer devices.

While video movies may be just fiction dressed in reality, and should therefore not be mistaken for life, they offer a linguistically valid alternative to living in a full-time English environment, for both EFL students and their teachers alike. They make it easier to imagine the context of living English than printed text, pictures or audio tape alone, because of their dynamic potential fusion of three communication modes: the vocal, visual and verbal. They offer wide ranges of such features as subject, language, communicative situation, imagination and culture. More than other EFL texts, video movies both seek out anything new with tireless persistence, but

at the same time are capable of possessing a long-term value that can at its best rival literature or any other art form. The huge subject range that movies offer makes almost any selection of life or human imagination both accessible and assimilable.

Studies of the communicative language range of movies as opposed to video made specifically for students of EFL (e.g. Tatsuki, 1992) indicate that the spread of linguistic levels is much wider, covering beginner, intermediate and advanced, instead of merely the very beginner and the most advanced. Movies contain a broad spectrum of diction appropriate to almost any social situation. In terms of sound quality and acoustic range, too, video offers more than just audio, which must struggle to oversimplify sound effects in making them at all comprehensible. The visual reinforcement of film can increase comprehensible language input (what you see is often what you hear too) and indeed the whole realm of hearing, thus heightening a viewer's sense of linguistic and paralinguistic authenticity. Especially in terms of the hidden language of video movies, that is to say the language they can evoke through sound, picture, idea and emotion, this factor can be a great stimulus for language generation.

The range of language environment is also extended by the study of video movies, and not just physically in terms of location, which can reach the home and society in general in a number of ways, creating a social link with most English speakers who tend to be equally interested in movies. Students who learn the necessary strategies to comprehend whole movies, or simply scenes to begin with, can apply them to their future viewing beyond the time limits of the school semester. The sheer availability of video movies, plus their attractiveness and appeal, can carry any interest in them created by their study in class further. This makes it all the more important to use the TEFL curriculum to teach students incisive video

analysis methods, such as how to evaluate films and compare them with other major forms of communication. Greater understanding can increase both the pleasure of watching and the quality of learning, at the same time linguistic and cultural.

The cultural aspect of video movies presents nearly every convention imaginable. It displays countless examples of problematical behavior, conflicts and cruxes, private lifestyles and casual speech (Macdonald, 1990). Such authentic experiences on which students can draw are almost impossible to convey in class settings by other means. While this may be dismissed as mere vicarious pseudo-experience, in EFL situations, where few other alternatives may exist, video movies can be the next best thing to reality, and cheaper, more durably utilizable and more flexible than buying experience in the form of homestays or trips abroad. They can also lower the anxiety level of many students.

3. Video Movies in English Teaching

Most studies on video include film rationales that justify the use of film in TEFL. Allen (1986) asserts that film's air of reality stimulates real-world language demands. Updating this view, Kirk (1992) demonstrates via surveys that movies encourage learners to study twice as much as ordinary texts, and nearly as much as native speaker teachers encourage them, with positive responses being 70%, 35% and 85% respectively. Similarly, teacher surveys (for example, in JALT Video N-SIG's *Video Rising* edited by Wood, 1990c) indicate that the majority of teachers using video prefer authentic video for teaching (video not specifically made for teaching English with) and that movies are the most often selected for use.

In some cases, video-movie segments and even entire movies have been

used to illustrate aspects of a curriculum not consisting solely of the movie itself, while in other cases, one or even a series of movies have constituted a complete course of study. Between the audio-visual-support and the tape-as-text approaches, there have naturally also been many variations. Yet, in even considering using video in the classroom, we must be fully aware of the status it can occupy, regardless of our intentions. Ultimately, media cannot easily assume a supplementary role in the instructional environment.

If films shown in classrooms are automatically the main focus, the input medium itself, how do we define their nature? Are they entertainment? Can they be educational? Should we call them literature, or are they a facet of culture? All of these conceptions have been ascribed by different teachers. Using movies exclusively raises the outcry of "electronic baby-sitter" (Uehara, 1989). Some teachers justify showing movies as entertainment, pointing to the potential follow-up stimulus for study, and even coining the related term, "edutainment" (for example, Berman, 1990). As with curricular status, there is a dichotomy, as all but the education label are disqualified by the copyright laws and guidelines, which not only rule out entertainment and culture, but even specifically define literary works as something other than audio-visual ones.

As might be expected with such disparate conceptions of video movies, time-frame strategies are equally multiform. Some users favor segments as short as half a minute, while others propose a whole range of movies in the course of a single year or less. Several teachers prefer to extract short sections from a number of movies, whereas others may suggest a single movie during the course of half a year or a year. Whatever the time frame, legal guidelines on the educational use of video movies stipulate their incorporation as part of the actual instructional process, so that straight-through showing becomes dubious. Few lessons could extend to a full-

length feature plus the necessary interchange between teacher and students.

An even more divisive issue concerns which aspects of language to teach. The most extreme difference concerns whether to teach principally the language that is actually contained in a video, or the language that can be generated from watching one. Of course, these approaches do not have to be exclusive, but there are clear leanings in one direction or another as demonstrated by the many approaches in evidence so far. Thus, some instructors elect to concentrate mainly on the vocabulary in a movie, or phonetic examples that it illustrates, while others isolate discourse features or grammar.

At the opposite extreme, a movie's specific or general topic may be chosen as a springboard to discussion. Alternatively, language patterns arising in film may be the stimulus to find similar or contrasting patterns for students to use communicatively in speaking about themselves. Certain instructors prefer to concentrate almost exclusively on listening comprehension, while others may attempt a more balanced four-skills approach. Movies have also been used as a stimulus for a class to produce its own short video, such as a news report on a major incident from a film (e.g. Tatsuki, 1990). Combinations of the above are possible, and there have even been attempts to use movie scenes specifically for competitive examination purposes. In fact, such a wide range of video techniques seems possible that several full-length studies have already been produced on such lines (e.g. Wood, 1992b and Mejia, 1995).

While not enough discussion has been conducted yet to dismiss any of these approaches out of hand, the video-language-only approach would certainly seem to reduce the potential learning opportunities of video movies, as well as narrowly cementing a class's perception against the natural flexibility of language. The visual element of video is a hidden

language resource in itself, as indicated above, which can never be tapped if the learning goal does not extend beyond the tapescript alone. As Visscher (1990) points out, however, reducing study approaches of the visual element of video to mere display questions only would seem equally erroneous.

Movie materials so far have included the following: home-use-only videos, videos marketed for instructional purposes, print-only materials, soundtrack and tapescript materials, and karaoke-style materials. They come from a number of sources and in a wide variety of forms. There is a gray area of permissible use. Currently the main supply of video movie materials in TEFL is the home-use-only source. Thus, films recorded from television or from rental shops, and movies from distributors or importers combine to provide the largest area of supply. Some of these may be subtitled, bilingual, dubbed into another language or in their original form.

Some video movies have been marketed for instructional purposes. Again, however, there is a lot of gray involved, but the simplest distinction within this category is the kind of material made for self instruction, and the smaller area of materials legally made for classroom use. Another division can be made by assigning the materials into those which actually use a video movie and those which do not, the latter leaving it up to the instructor or student to revert to one of the sources indicated previously.

Some of the different types of product so far include short transcripts of individual scenes, accompanied by movie summaries, film backgrounds, selected vocabulary or grammatical explanations, and so on. Other print-only materials include full-movie transcripts, the publication rights for which the company must own to distribute legally.

Sometimes the soundtrack is marketed along with the tapescript for listening and pronunciation practice. There are videos with tapescripts

containing blanks for learners to complete. Occasionally tapescripts are marketed with a captioned or subtitled movie, even offering computer compatible decoders to produce customized study sheets.

In the context of the self-instruction market, subtitles, closed captions and open captions mark three subcategories of video-movie tape in circulation. These may be accompanied by a slim text which extracts short dialogues or may have no accompanying support material at all.

One system is based on the Japanese *karaoke* concept, making it perhaps more fashionable than pedagogically sound. Language learners can listen to the original and then to themselves reading the captions on the screen. Another has been initiated in conjunction with movie producers themselves. Perhaps in response to the tremendous interest in Hollywood films around the globe, companies in Japan have seen new scope for marketing video movies, recycling home-use entertainment as home-use self instruction. Thus principally hardware companies have reinvested in the software market in this way.

In conclusion, few legally available support materials of a genuine pedagogical nature exist for teaching EFL with movies. However, a tremendous amount of potential texts exists in the form of the unprinted work of many individual teachers. The full development of such exciting resources is well overdue, but there is no clear prospect of their emerging except temporarily at language conferences, or in partial form in various EFL publications. For the time being, any development seems limited to teachers networking via the various video research groups around the world, such as JALT's Video N-SIG founded by this present writer, which has generated many articles through its newsletter, *Video Rising*, as well as three Video Special Editions of *The Language Teacher* in its ten years of existence.

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